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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF ALBERT HENRY SMYTH

BY JOSEPH G. ROSENGARTEN



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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF ALBERT HENRY SMYTH.

By JOSEPH G. ROSENGARTEN.

(Read May 17, 1907.)

Albert Henry Smyth was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society on May 20, 1887. He has been continuously active and useful in it. At the request of the President this brief statement of Professor Smyth's life and work is presented in accordance with our custom.

He was born in Philadelphia on June 18, 1863, and was educated at the George G. Meade Public School, graduated in the June '82 class of the Philadelphia High School, was the valedictorian, and encouraged by the then President Dr. Riche and Professor Taylor, later President, went to Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, where he received a Master of Arts degree "causa honoris," in 1886,—it was his thesis for his M.A. degree, "Shakespeare's Pericles and Apollonius of Tyre," that rewritten and with large additions, he read before this Society. It is printed in our *Proceedings*, and earned praise for its research on a recondite subject.

His services to this Society were constant and valuable,—he was one of its curators, a member of the Library Committee, represented it at the University of Glasgow on its forty-fifth anniversary, and at the dedication in Paris of the Statue of Franklin, the gift of John H. Harjes, a former resident of this city,—on that occasion too by the appointment of the President of the United States, he was the representative of this country, and his address received the well deserved praise of all his auditors and readers, among them many of the foremost representatives of French eloquence and learning. His addresses at the annual celebration of this Society were always noteworthy, and his last appearance at the general meeting in April of this year, shortly before his untimely death, was warmly welcomed.

His printed works include a sketch of "American Literature,"

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published in 1888; "Philadelphia Magazines and Their Contributors," 1892; "Bayard Taylor" in "American Men of Letters" series, 1896; "Shakespeare's Pericles and Apollonius of Tyre," 1898. He was the founder and editor of "Shakesperiana," and was thoroughly imbued with knowledge and love of the great dramatist; he edited "Burke's Letter to a Noble Lord," 1898, and "Pope's Homer's Iliad," 1899, and he was a frequent contributor to magazines and newspapers. His papers were like his popular lectures, for some years, notably about Shakespeare's country, with which he was intimate from frequent pilgrimages, often in the companionship of English men of letters whose friendship and sympathy he enjoyed to a degree rare indeed for a man of his age,—he was as much at home among scholars abroad as at home.

His greatest service to this Society, to the public, and to the fame of our founder, was his ten volume edition of the "Works and Correspondence of Benjamin Franklin," only recently completed. It was a great task and it was carried through with characteristic industry, devotion and critical ability. He was largely inspired to this undertaking by his familiarity with the unrivalled collection of Franklin Papers, over seventy folio volumes, long in the possession of this Society. He atoned for the careless editing of Franklin's Works by Wm. Temple Franklin,—he corrected the errors and restored the real words of Franklin, so frequently altered in Sparks' edition, and he made large and valuable additions to Bigelow's, and that venerable and learned master of Franklin literature generously and heartily commended his young successor's work.

Professor Smyth had in contemplation at the time of his too early death, a popular Life of Franklin, and a Life of Washington, and historical students may well regret that his life was not spared for the accomplishment of these tasks.

Elected in 1886 Professor of English Language and Literature in the Central High School of Philadelphia, he showed remarkable gifts for his task, and won the affection and admiration alike of his colleagues and his pupils. He was constantly helping the students who showed ability, and encouraged them in securing admission to Colleges and Universities, or positions, where many of them gained marked distinction. His popularity with the large body of stu-

dents of the High School was an unusual tribute to his ability, his industry and his broad and generous sympathy with all who shared his love of study.

His "Shakespeare's Pericles and Apollonius of Tyre," a study in Comparative Literature, was the outcome of his Johns Hopkins thesis for his M.A. degree,—recast and expanded, it was read before the American Philosophical Society and was printed in volume thirty-seven of its Proceedings. Reprinted in 1898, it obtained great praise from competent Shakespearean critics at home and abroad, and it is a monument of his learning and critical ability. As he said in reply to some verbal criticism of his frequent use of Shakespearean words and phrases, "A student's nature is soon subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand, and I have worked in Shakespeare, steeping myself in his language, until unconsciously I use words and phrases which are, to me, rich in suggestion and association," and he made good use of his mastery of Shakespere.

His great work was his "Writings of Franklin." It was the most effective and important tribute to Franklin's Bicentenary, so well celebrated by this and kindred societies, founded by Franklin and of which he was a member. The ten volumes of Franklin will be a lasting monument of Professor Smyth's industry, research and critical acumen. He unearthed new material at home and abroad to the extent of three hundred and eighty-five letters and forty papers all from Franklin's pen, and not printed by any previous editor; he corrected more than two thousand errors in earlier editions, and restored the text so much altered by Sparks in his mistaken notion of improving Franklin's racy and vigorous English. He found new material in public and private collections, in that recently acquired by the Library of the University of Pennsylvania, as a tribute to its great founder, and in public archives at home and abroad, and in the collections never before consulted by any editor of Franklin's writings. He gave a full account of the Franklin Papers, rescued from neglect and now reverently preserved in the Library of the American Philosophical Society, in the Congressional Library, and in that of the University of Pennsylvania. He gave a bibliography of the printed editions of Franklin's Writings, an analysis of his works, philosophical, politi-

cal and economical, of his satires and bagatelles and of his multifarious correspondence. With all his zeal and admiration for Franklin, and his ability in so many directions, scientific, economic, political, diplomatic, financial and social, Professor Smyth put a proper limit and restriction upon the reproduction of some of Franklin's writings, as unfitted for the public of today, and of some public papers wrongly attributed to Franklin or that have lost their value and interest. What he gives shows Franklin at his best, and justifies that admiration of him as a man and a philosopher, as a statesman and a diplomatist, which has made Franklin's fame world wide.

Smyth's Franklin is a work of great and lasting value, it is the definitive edition of his writings, for the editor gave to it the best results of modern literary canons as to the right way to edit the writings of so marked and individual a man as Franklin. In these days of sound historical methods, and in absolute adhesion to the fixed rule to give the words of the original text of letters and other writings, Professor Smyth edited Franklin's Writings, with a fidelity that commends his edition to all students. The Index, that trying test for all editors, is so complete and exhaustive that an inquirer can easily find every item of Franklin's multifarious writings under subject, place, correspondent or other proper heading. Professor Smyth unburied the earliest of Franklin's writings, the newspaper articles which first revealed his remarkable ability, followed his many notable publications, illuminated his widely scattered correspondence by judicious notes, compressing in many of them in a few lines, the result of many and far reaching investigations. He showed critical care alike in exclusion, inclusion and explanation.

His "Life of Franklin" was all too short, and he had planned to use his large knowledge in the preparation of a Life of Franklin, free from the restraint of space prescribed by the publishers of his "Franklin's Writings," and in it he would have used that intimate knowledge of Franklin which he showed in frequent addresses, in some magazine articles, and in lectures, and particularly in his masterly and eloquent oration on the unveiling of the statue of Franklin in Paris, the work of a Philadelphia artist, Boyle, the

gift of an old resident of Philadelphia, Mr. John H. Harjes,—on April 27, 1906, in the Trocadero. In the presence of a great audience, Professor Smyth added to his reputation by an oration on Franklin that won the plaudits of the foremost French men gathered together to honor Franklin's memory. That he was chosen by President Roosevelt to make the address of presentation of the Franklin statue, was another tribute to his successful work as the editor of "Franklin's Writings," and brought home to French statesmen and men of letters, the wisdom of the choice made by President Roosevelt, himself an historian well qualified to select the best man.

Professor Smyth had a legion of admirers abroad,—he made almost annual pilgrimages to great historical shrines, and had hosts of friends among the foremost men of letters in Great Britain, in Germany and in France,—he had found sympathetic fellow students in Russia and Poland, in Greece and Italy. He knew Stratford on Avon as he knew Shakespeare, thoroughly, and in London literary clubs, in the great Libraries of London and the English Universities, in Paris and Berlin, he was a familiar visitor, known as a sound student, and welcomed for his many and varied gifts; alike in speech and familiar letters he showed his mastery of English literature, and in his many lectures, his wonderful memory was always helpful to his great gift of eloquence.

As a lecturer in University Extension and Free Library courses and on other occasions, he was heard by thousands, and always with delight and instruction. Under the pressure of the hard work on his ten volume Franklin, he was obliged to curtail his lectures, but in the few given by him during the last winter, he seemed to find relaxation from his Franklin and from his High School work, in delightful lectures on the literature and the literary men and shrines with which he was so familiar. Gifted with a fine presence and an admirable voice, his lectures were a source of infinite pleasure and of much solid instruction.

He gave to the Philosophical Society two capital memorial addresses, one on Dr. Daniel G. Brinton, the other on Henry Phillips, Jr., both scholars and men who had given much of their best work to this Society, and Professor Smyth's tributes were well worthy

of the subjects. His many avocations were always so arranged as to allow him to be a frequent attendant at the meetings of the Society and its committees; his share in its annual meetings was an active one, and all who heard his brief, incisive, witty and well turned addresses in introducing the speakers at its last Annual Dinner, felt that the death of such a man at the age of forty-three, was indeed a great loss and a lasting sorrow.

That such a man as Albert Smyth, with his vigor and outspoken courage, should have enemies was natural, and to their discredit rather than to his, for he outlived the attacks made upon him, and showed that there was little or no foundation for them, by the amount and excellence of his work, by the appreciation of his colleagues and pupils at the High School, and by the admiration of all who were associated with him in his many fields of activity. Life seemed just bringing him the best fruits of his laborious youth,—he was asked by Publishers to undertake more literary work, and with each year this became easier to him, for his large store of learning was always at his call. One of our great Universities was about to call him to succeed a well recognized leader in history and literature, another was about to confer on him a degree of LL.D., and it was thought that he might well have the offer as one of the professorial American representatives in a great German University. His only doubt was as to giving up teaching and lecturing to enable him to devote himself to authorship,—but the end came suddenly, and now we have only his literary remains, and the recollection of a personality that attracted all who came within its reach. Wit, eloquence, learning, many unusual gifts concentrated in him.

His early youth up to manhood was one of much hardship and struggle, but he was never embittered by his hard experience of poverty, nor was he spoiled by the success of his mature years and the praise that came with it. He never forgot any kindness or help shown to him in his hours of trial,—and he was always watchful and helpful of the young men who came under his observation,—to them he repaid in abundant measure, all and much more than all of the help that had benefited him. This was the truest test and proof of the sound manliness of his character, and this it

was, quite as much as admiration for his gifts and talents and the good use he made of them; that made him hosts of friends and endeared him to them.

Mr. John Bigelow, the leading authority on Franklin and the man who rescued the original MS. of the famous Autobiography from oblivion, wrote of Professor Smyth's Franklin, "The development of the scientific side of Franklin will be new to the general reader, and the lack of it was perhaps the most conspicuous deficiency of all previous collections," and again on the completion of the work, "Your collection of the literary remains of Franklin constitutes in my judgment one of the most faithful, conscientious and thorough pieces of editorial work with which our literature has been enriched. It places the crown of glory upon the fame of Franklin which no one will ever dare or desire to displace." Such praise from such a man as John Bigelow, himself the foremost exponent of Franklin literature, was indeed grateful.

Of all the many and touching obituary notices of Professor Smyth, the most eloquent was that of William Winter, in the *New York Tribune* of May fifth, the day after Professor Smyth's death. Winter himself is a Shakespearian scholar, a poet and a man of letters,—he had great sympathy with his younger brother in literature, and it is admirably shown in his biographical and critical sketch. I am sure it will be welcomed by all who knew Professor Smyth and admired his gifts.

"ALBERT HENRY SMYTH.¹

"One of the noblest minds, one of the gentlest spirits, one of the most auspicious lives in American literature, passes from this world, in the death of Albert Henry Smyth, which befell yesterday morning in Philadelphia. To those who intimately knew him the news of this sudden bereavement brings with it a shock so dreadful as almost to paralyze thought and make any sort of commemorative word impossible. He was in the prime of life: he was in the affluence of enjoyment and hope: he had just completed and published his superb edition of the works of Franklin, together with his *Life of that statesman*: the echoes of his oratorical triumph at Paris, where he spoke, at the international unveiling of the statue of the great philosopher, had not died away: he had gained an un-

¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, Sunday, May 5, 1907. 2nd Edition.

fading laurel of fame: he was surrounded with affectionate friends: he was richly honored: he was dearly loved: and the pathway to yet more splendid achievements in letters and a yet wider circle and ampler wealth of friends and of honors seemed opening before him, in one long vista of golden promise. His vitality, alike of body and mind, was so extraordinary that no thought of death could ever be associated with him. He seemed formed to lead battalions of thought and to endure forever. His countenance was the beacon light of hope and joy. He animated every mind with which he came in contact. He dissipated all doubts of a glorious future, and he dispelled all dejection. He was a ripe and thorough scholar, and he used his scholarship to cheer the onward march, and not to dispense gloom. He was a natural orator. He possessed a wonderful memory, and it was richly stored with knowledge of the classic literature of all lands. It is doubtful whether, in this respect, his equal exists among American men of letters. He was a reverent student of Shakespeare, and he was entirely competent as a Shakespeare scholar. Among his works there is a most admirable book on "Pericles and Apollonius." He wrote a life of "Bayard Taylor" and a charming book upon the magazines of Philadelphia and the literary movement in that old city—which he so much loved and in which he will be so deeply mourned and so tenderly remembered. His ambition was to excel in learning and to augment the excellence of American literature. He always advocated the right. He abhorred and denounced all the "crank" movements of the day, and all the efforts now in progress to corrupt the pure stream of literature with erotic mush. In one word, he was all that is meant by gentleman. Our society can ill afford to lose such a man as Albert Henry Smyth. Intellectual men find the strife of this world very hard, advocating that which is right, but the best that any thinking worker can do is to follow in his footsteps. The loss of him is unspeakable—but his example remains.

"W. W."

SOME OF THE SUBJECTS OF PROFESSOR SMYTH'S LECTURES.

As characteristic of the width and breadth of his studies, the following list will show how far reaching were his lectures, the fruit of much reading and study.

Franklin; Pepys; Thos. Love Peacock; Modern Polish Literature; Modern Symbolists; American Literature; English Literature; Shakespeare; Shakespeare Readings; Burns and Scott; The Lake School and Country; Nineteenth Century Authors; Literary Memorials of Philadelphia; Irving and Cooper; Hawthorne and Poe; Whittier; The Argonauts of '49; Lowell; The Land of Shakespeare; Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, illustrated by an exposition of the construction of the Merchant of Venice and Midsummer Night's Dream, Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear.

American Literature:—The Colonial Period; The Revolutionary Period; Washington Irving and the New York Writers; Emerson and the awakening of New England; Hawthorne and Poe; Lowell and American Culture; Burns, Scott and the Lake Poets; Bayard Taylor; The Land of Burns and Scott; Wordsworth; Coleridge; Southey, Wilson and De Quincey, Harriet Martineau, the Arnolds, Ruskin and Wm. Watson.

English Literature from Shakespeare to Tennyson; Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Meredith, Hardy, Kipling.

This is but part of the lecture courses given by Professor Smyth from 1890 to 1907, and not only in Philadelphia and its neighborhood, but in many distant localities.

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- A "Franklin's Autobiography" with notes was Professor Smyth's last piece of work,—it is to be published in the Gateway Series edited by Henry Van Dyke.



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